

I'll Stop the World (and Melt With You) by moonflowers

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Summary:

"Sure," he said. What made him say what he said next was still a bit of a mystery to Steve. Maybe he was pushing his luck a bit, maybe he was just in a good mood, or maybe a bad one. Perhaps it was sheer desperation, confusion over how to get what he wanted that made him turn to Billy, arms folded, and say - "can I get a hug goodbye?"

I'll Stop the World (and Melt With You)

Author's Note:

Back at it with the making everybody too soft. I just wanted something nice. Like the sort of thing you read before work/school and it sets you up for the day. Dunno if I succeeded, but have fun kids.

Title from I Melt With You by Modern English.

Steve was there first. He wasn't always, usually only when he'd had a rough night's sleep and had left the house as soon as it was light, when he couldn't bear staring at the ceiling any longer. Sometimes Billy was there first, if his dad was being an asshole and he just needed to get out. They didn't talk about either thing if they could help it, but they both knew it went on, and that was sort of enough, for now. They met most mornings for a smoke before school, always behind the math building, because that's where the sun hit first thing, the brick warm on their backs and sun in their eyes as they passed a cigarette back and forth.

He watched as the Camaro pulled up with a crunch on the grit, what he thought was maybe Metallica blasting out of the open windows. Watched as Billy poured himself out of the driver's side and Max slammed the door behind her. He saw her see him, saw her say something to Billy too far away for him to hear, saw Billy flip her off before she skated away, cackling with laughter.

Billy was already grinning when he sauntered over to where Steve was waiting, hands stuffed into the pockets of his denim jacket. At least it'd warmed up enough so that he could actually wear it without looking like he was about to freeze to death now, the idiot. When he was close enough, he drew a hand out of his pocket and reached towards Steve's face. For a moment, he had no clue what Billy was doing, until he heard the blunt tap of a fingernail against the lens of his glasses. He'd forgotten to take them off again.

"Cute specs, nerd."

Steve huffed and batted his hand away. They'd done enough studying

together by now to know that if anyone was a nerd out of the two of them, it was Billy. "Thanks." He'd borne witness to Steve's glasses before, enough times by now that he'd stopped outright laughing when Steve forgot to take them off and stash them quickly out of sight, but that didn't stop him from being a dick about it whenever he got the chance.

"You're welcome," slumped next to him against the wall, bracing himself with one foot lifted to press flat on the brick. "Your turn Harrington, we both know you can afford better shit than me."

"Yeah yeah, keep your shirt on," Steve dug in his jacket for the pack of cigarettes.

"Huh. Funny, I don't get told that very often."

"What?" Steve said around the cigarette he'd just put between his lips. The pack was almost new, but he didn't offer Billy one of his own; they always shared.

"Keep my shirt on."

"Wow. Original."

"You know Becky wants in your pants," Billy said, swiping the cigarette away as soon as Steve had lit it. Steve had a habit of fidgeting, found it hard to sit still. It made him feel a little less like he was going to burst out of his skin. He was well aware of it, which was maybe why he'd noticed Billy was always playing with his mouth, was always either smoking or chewing gum, biting at his lip or his thumbnail. Maybe it helped him.

"What?" Steve was too thrown to bitch at him for snatching the cigarette. "No she doesn't." He knew for a fact she was fooling around with Craig.

"That's not what I heard."

"Yeah well, it doesn't matter anyway."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want in hers." Truth was he was starting to wonder if he wanted in Billy's, but fuck off could he ever admit to that.

Billy hummed around the cigarette, nodding thoughtfully. "Probably for the best."

Something hitched in Steve's chest, made his voice come out thin and tight. "Yeah? How come?"

"Because we felt each other up at Matt's party last month, and now she's had her hands on my ass, nothing else could possibly compare."

"Are you saying I don't have a good butt?" Steve shook his head, biting back a smile. "Unbelievable."

"Of course you do, pretty boy," Billy said, patting his shoulder in consolation, "I wouldn't hurt you like that. I'm just sayin' mine's better."

"Dick," Steve said, though he couldn't really argue. He'd caught himself eyeing up Billy's ass all wrapped up in those damn blue jeans enough times to know it wasn't a coincidence.

Billy just winked, and handed the cigarette back.

They passed it back and forth a while, leaning against the sun-warmed brick and saying nothing, watching as the lot started to fill up for the day. Billy looked good. But then he always looked good; took care make sure, in the same way that Steve did, that everyone saw what he wanted them to. Jeans painted on and hair artfully fluffed, wearing a smirk and a silver earring, pink mouth around a cigarette and smoke spilling between his lips, or pursed when he was concentrating in class. Even better though, was how he looked when no one else was around. When his focus was away from himself, face less guarded and lazily watching the sky, or mouth cracked in a surprised smile at something Steve had said.

They were friends, of a sort. The sort where they barely said hey in the school halls and didn't do normal friend stuff like go to the movies or the diner or each other's houses, but the sort where they talked absolute garbage to each other like they didn't with anyone else, where they met up at the quarry after dark to unload like they

didn't to anyone else, and left a little lighter because of it. It was the weirdest friendship Steve had ever had, and the only one where he was never 100% sure where he stood with the other person - everyone else has always been so easy.

The bell rung just as Steve was handing over the cigarette, and he tried to hide his flinch by hitching his bag up on his shoulder.

"Quarry later?" Billy said, sucking in the last of the smoke, quick and hard, before putting it out against the wall. He wasn't looking at Steve.

"Sure," he said. What made him say what he said next was still a bit of a mystery to Steve. Maybe he was pushing his luck a bit, maybe he was just in a good mood, or maybe a bad one. Perhaps it was sheer desperation, confusion over how to get what he wanted that made him turn to Billy, arms folded, and say - "can I get a hug goodbye?"

Billy visibly startled, looked at him like he'd grown another head - Steve was tempted to check that he hadn't, because you never fucking knew in Hawkins - and stared him down. Steve could see the moment he decided what he was going to do about it, saw him squaring up like Steve had just issued him with a challenge, and one thing everybody knew was that Billy Hargrove did not back down from a challenge.

"For you pretty boy," he said with the expected sharp grin and enough bravado that it could have been played off as a joke, "anything." But Steve could see the surprise behind his typical mask; eyes just a little too wide and the way his usually tight smile fluttered at the edges, and thought *fuck*. Just maybe.

Billy brought his arms up around Steve's neck, over his shoulders, and pulled him forward into a hug. Steve could feel his chin on his shoulder, cheek grazing his cheek as he shifted his weight, nose in his hair. His glasses were pushed askew, dug into his nose. They touched a lot, come to think of it - in basketball, passing cigarettes between them, pats on the back and slaps on the shoulder, ruffling each other's hair just to piss the other one off - same little touches that passed between any sort of friends. But this was different.

Once his body caught up with his brain, Steve lifted his arms to spread his hands over Billy's back. One rested on the back of his denim jacket, but he miscalculated with the other, and it slipped up into the gap left between Billy's jacket and shirt when he'd raised his arms to hug Steve, bunched up at the small of his back in the worn-soft fabric of his t-shirt. He smelt of hairspray, of too much cologne, the inside of his car and the cigarette they'd just smoked. They were all scents Steve was familiar with, but they felt different so much closer, the warmth of Billy pressed all along his front, and Steve's eyes slipped shut against the morning sun at Billy's back.

The moment was effectively ended though, when he felt Billy lick up the side of his face, chin to cheek, wet and slick and pretty fucking gross, and a hand sneaking down to grab at his ass. Steve shoved him away, wiping at his face and knocking his glasses, annoyed at Billy for doing it in the first place and annoyed at himself for not being mad about it.

"God, you fucking asshole!" he said, trying not to blush or laugh, trying to look angry and probably failing miserably. Billy saw right through it, because of course he did, and was laughing harder than ever - his real laugh too, not the sneering, false one he had when he was dicking about with Tommy and the basketball guys. It was enough to make Steve give up his attempt to look mad, and join in. But when their laughter ebbed away, they were still watching each other, Steve feeling flushed and a little dazed, and thought that Billy looked it too.

"I - "

"Later, Harrington," Billy cut him off with a too-sharp feral grin, before turning his back, sloping off around the corner to class before Steve had time to reply.

Yeah, he thought, already anticipating the heat of Billy next to him as they leant against the Camaro, quarry dark below them and stars above, *later. I'll tell him later.*

Steve was there first. He wasn't always; it was kind of hit and miss depending on who needed to get the fuck out of their house more that morning. It wasn't something they talked about. Billy wanted to know what it was that put smudgy dark circles under Steve's eyes and made him flee from his house so early, but if Steve told him about that, then he'd have to talk about his dad, and yeah that wasn't going to happen any time soon.

Max had been in good mood that morning too. Funnily enough, they were both in a better mood when their day hadn't kicked off with a shouting match between Billy and his dad. Their drive in to school had been mostly silent, but not a tense, uncomfortable one like they always used to be. He played Metallica, and she drummed her fingers along to the chorus, wind whipping in through the open window and blowing her hair about. He guessed she wasn't the worst little sister in the world. He changed his mind though, when they parked up at school and got out of the car, when Max smirked at him and said -

"Your boyfriend's waiting for you."

"What?" he snapped, followed her gaze across to where Steve was leaning against the side of the math building. "What the fuck, Max?"

"It's rude to keep him waiting," she said, still grinning, and dropped her board to the ground to skate away.

"I will fucking kill you Maxine!" he flipped her off as she sped towards the school, laughing madly at what they both knew was an empty threat. "Little shit," he muttered to himself as set off across the parking lot. She was only joking, he knew that, but at the same time it made him feel tight and hot and angry and happy, made him think, *if fucking only*.

He smiled as he walked over, partly because it was Steve and he couldn't fucking help it, but also because he was wearing those damn glasses, big tortoiseshell frames and cute as hell, although he knew Steve kind of hated them, had only recently stopped caring so much about his rep that he'd occasionally wear them in school. He reached out to tap on one of the lenses, and Steve blinked.

"Cute specs, nerd," he said as Steve swatted him away. Pretty fucking rich coming from Billy really, considering his last report card, but Steve let him get away with it.

"Thanks." He only teased Steve about the glasses out of habit now, or to keep up appearances or some shit, maybe a little bit to distract himself from how much he liked it when Steve wore them. He'd laughed his ass off the first time he'd seen them, but now it didn't seem so funny.

"You're welcome," he slumped against the wall next to Steve, bracing himself with one foot lifted to press flat on the brick. "Your turn Harrington, we both know you can afford better shit than me."

"Yeah yeah, keep your shirt on," Steve said, pulling out a carton of cigarettes from his jacket pocket.

"Huh. Funny," Billy said with deliberate sincerity, "I don't get told that very often."

"What?" Steve said, frowning as he slipped a cigarette between his lips. Billy didn't ask for one of his own; they always shared, and he got a kick out of knowing the end was damp from Steve's mouth.

"Keep my shirt on."

"Wow," Steve rolled his eyes, "original."

"You know Becky wants in your pants," Billy said, swiping the cigarette away as soon as Steve had lit it, needing something to do with his hands, to keep his mouth busy.

"What?" Steve's frown grew deeper, thrown off by Billy's sudden veer in conversation. "No she doesn't."

"That's not what I heard." He'd heard nothing of the sort, and the whole school knew Becky was getting ploughed by that Craig guy who never shut up about hockey, but sometimes he just couldn't help himself stirring things up.

"Yeah well, it doesn't matter anyway."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want in hers," Steve said with barely a second's hesitation.

Billy made a show of nodding thoughtfully, trying to keep cool when such a simple statement that could mean any number of things made him feel that familiar, dangerous spike of hope. "Probably for the best."

"Yeah?" He felt Steve go still next to him. "How come?"

"Because we felt each other up at Matt's party last month, and now she's had her hands on my ass, nothing else could possibly compare." She'd sucked his dick too, but he hadn't gotten as much of a kick out of it as he'd hoped, not with his mind on somebody else.

"Are you saying I don't have a good butt?" Steve said, but he looked more amused than pissed. "Unbelievable."

"Of course you do, pretty boy," Billy patted his shoulder. He would know, he'd made a fucking study of the swell of Steve's ass in basketball shorts, "I wouldn't hurt you like that. I'm just sayin' mine's better."

"Dick."

Billy just winked, and handed the cigarette back.

They passed it back and forth a while, leaning against the sun-warmed brick and saying nothing, watching as the lot started to fill up for the day. Steve looked good - big fucking surprise there, he always looked good, even on those days he obviously didn't feel good. His hair was falling forward into his eyes, soft in a way that made Billy want to both run his hands through it gently and tug at it hard in equal measure, face pinked by the morning chill despite each day getting a little warmer. He'd stopped wearing his ugly-ass scarf now that spring was finally starting to show its face, and Billy could see the moles on the side of his neck.

Steve Harrington was the first person to come close to anything resembling a friend Billy had had for a long time. He'd been careful

not to have too many friends in recent years, partly through self-preservation and partly because most people tended to piss him off. But Steve didn't, or didn't any more anyway, since they'd actually started talking instead of just taking swings at each other. And though there were still days when Billy was feeling a little messed up, would say something too harsh and Steve's face would fall, soft with hurt for a split second before it turned steely and he stalked away, leaving Billy to cool off on his own, things were better. Yeah, things were... nice.

The bell rang just as Steve was handing over the cigarette. Billy hated himself for the pang of disappointment it made him feel.

"Quarry later?" he asked, taking one last drag and carefully not looking at Steve, focusing on the reddish brown brick of the math building instead as he put the cigarette out. See, he had this fear that one day Steve would say no, would ditch him for a better offer and they'd be back to square one, so it was just better all around that he didn't know how much Billy needed their stolen evenings together.

"Sure," Steve said, and Billy felt the tension drop back out of his shoulders a little. But it rushed right back again when he heard Steve softly clear his throat before saying, low and with enough levity that it could be meant as a joke - "can I get a hug goodbye?"

Billy stared at him, couldn't help it, looking for any sign of what the fuck Steve meant by asking him that. Steve wore his emotions plainly on his face for the whole damn world to see, and it was usually easy enough to tell when he was just trying to press Billy's buttons. But he looked serious enough, little frown back on his face and watching Billy evenly. There was no way he could just say no without looking like an idiot - there was no reason why he shouldn't be okay with something so simple as slinging his arm around his buddy's shoulder. He could probably laugh it off, give him a shove and tell him not to be such a fucking girl. Would have done, as short a time as a few weeks ago. But now? It should have been nothing, they touched each other all the time, but just... not like that. He had to do it, or he'd look like he was freaking out over nothing. He had to do it because, joke or not, he wanted to.

"For you pretty boy," he smiled, sharp and hopefully normal enough

that Steve wouldn't be able to see how thrown off his game he was by such a simple request, "anything."

Fuck it, he thought, and went in for the hug, looping his arms around Steve's neck. They were a pretty similar height - Billy a touch shorter, a fact he refused to acknowledge - so he didn't have to duck down like he did with chicks, or stretch up. He rested his chin on Steve's shoulder, felt his quick, hot breaths against his neck, the smell of his hair product tickling Billy's nose. It smelt nicer than his cheap spray did. He shifted closer, which seemed to jerk Steve into action, and he felt Steve's hands lift to grasp at his back. One he could barely feel through the denim of his jacket, but the other had slipped up underneath, Steve's long fingers bunched in the back of his t-shirt, cold through the thin fabric. As well as the sweet, ticklish tang of whatever fancy shit Steve put in his hair, he smelt of coffee and soap, of the cigarette they'd just shared, and the clean wool of his sweater. Billy could feel him breathing, in and out and carefully steady. And he was usually so careful to keep his distance, stuck to the elbows in ribs and slaps on the back around others, allowed himself the odd graze of bruised knuckles when they passed a smoke between them. But he'd let himself have it now, wasn't sure he'd be able to go back, it rocked the boat and freaked him the fuck out.

So he did what he always did when things got too much; he caused a distraction. He stuck his tongue out, ran it along the side of Steve's neck - right over those two little moles - and up his cheek until his nose bumped against the frame of Steve's glasses. At the same time, he reached down to grab a handful off his ass through his jeans.

"God, you fucking asshole!"

Steve shoved him away, looking a little ruffled and indignant, sort of like a cat when they've just fallen off something and try to play it cool. But he was fighting back laughter just as much as Billy was, wiping at his face and biting his lip against a smile, before they both burst into a fit of laughter so hard Billy was almost crying. But it melted into silence again almost as quick, and left them blinking at each other. Billy's neck was hot, Steve's eyes wide and glazed over behind his glasses. He looked like he was about to say something, but Billy didn't want to hear it, didn't want to alter in any way how he felt just then, light and perfect.

"I - "

"Later, Harrington," he said, startled by the crack in his voice and leering to cover it up, turning away before Steve could say anything else.

Later, he thought, already impatient for the feel of Steve sprawled next to him that he'd grown so used to so quickly, so much easier in the cover of night, *later. I'll tell him later.*

Author's Note:

I haven't written such flirty, smoky, pining boys since Downton Abbey.
Should have read it through again, but I'm tired.